

# KRISHNAMURTI SCHOOL IN ARGENTINA

Editorial note taken from the newspaper (online) "EL LITORAL". (\*)

<http://www.ellitoral.com/index.php/diarios/2014/06/14/nosotros/NOS-05.html>

Edition June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014 - By Mariela Goy

## La Cecilia, a different school

A few minutes from Santa Fe city, in Monte Vera (Argentina), there is an alternative educational establishment that seeks to incentivize the child's interest and potentiate his abilities. Its proposal, nothing of conventional at all is based on democratic and freedom principles.



Text editor: MARIELA GOY ([mgoy@ellitoral.com](mailto:mgoy@ellitoral.com)). Photos: Flavio Raina.

This is a school that does not seem anything like a school. It rather seems more like a farm surrounded by plenty vegetation, singing birds and leaves of trees shaken by the autumn breeze. An idyllic landscape. Children from the elementary school get off the

school bus or are accompanied by their parents. High school teenagers get off the bus as a gang, laughing, chatting, and joking with each other. No bell rings calling to the class, no flag is raised, no line up.

Children take off their shoes and bare footed get to the assembly hall that has multiple uses. Outside there is a trail of shoes that look like a postal for the stranger. In the carpeted hall, they seat like “little Chinese” to begin the 15 minutes of meditation. Teenagers get into it rapidly, the youngsters take a little longer but they end up cultivated by the silence.

Just like this a day starts in the School for the New Culture “La Cecilia”, located on the provincial route No.5, within the Monte Vera district just minutes from Santa Fe city. “The idea of the morning meeting or a quiet moment is for the students to ‘lower a gear’, to forget the hustle and bustle of the school bus, the domestic problems and to be in harmony with a calm school environment” explains Ginés del Castillo, legal representative and maker of the school together with his wife Cecilia, who inspired the name to this very unconventional educational institution.

More than 20 years ago, Ginés -an electro-mechanic technician specialized in power station transformers- was dissatisfied with the traditional education his children were having and he wanted something different for the youngest. “By then, we were several who shared a critical stand on the conventional educational system. We considered that it did not answer to the basic needs of human development and that it had harmful elements, among them, the taking away children’s creativity and initiative”... says Ginés who decided to start an ambitious project.

## **From the idea to the facts**

One day the couple was traveling on this route and saw a For Sale sign on a 2 hectares land. They felt that the school they had in mind deserved a place like this one, with a lot of green and fresh air. So they took a risk, bought the land and went to live in the house that was in it.

In March 1991, Ginés and Cecilia hired a kindergarten teacher and started the educational activities in a little set up hall. They started with just two students –their son

and a friend's child- but at the end of the year they already had 15 children, so they started the governmental paperwork for the opening of a pre-school section.

La Cecilia was growing and from those two students in its beginnings, today it has 110 children in total: 15 at pre-school, 35 in the primary and 60 in high school. It is an institution endorsed by the Province Ministry of Education of Santa Fe to function as an authorized private school, which means that it follows all educational requisites and grants official certificates.

"There was great resistance and doubts over our project at the beginning. Luckily, now they know us and that opposition is not the same", asserts Ginés.

## **A DIFFERENT PROPOSAL**

This educational project is not for everyone. From the start, the families whose children go to 'La Cecilia' must share the kind of philosophy this democratic school proposes; where relationships are more horizontal, the teaching is centered in the student and it works with a concept of "inner freedom", without conditionings; also where the contact with nature turns into an essential pedagogical tool.

The father who sends his child to 'La Cecilia' must accept, for example, that the canteen is vegetarian, there are neither flags nor patriotic ceremonies, there are no exams, the grades and courses are flexible groupings and teenagers choose the subjects they wish to do that day, between other particularities.

Children and teenagers describe the school like this: "Here we can do what we like". "In my previous school I studied by heart and now if you ask me, I don't know anything, but here instead, everything we do, I remember". "This a different school and I can grow into music and math that I am interested in". "We don't have exams and this is so cool!" "Did you know that we are important people in here?" "The teachers are like any of us, and if you give them an idea, they take it".

## ORGANIZATION AND TEACHING

The school works with a model of “flexible groupings” and “open classes”. This means that students are grouped according to their needs of learning, their interests and socio-affective affinities and not necessarily by their ages. “We have children from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades together, and in high school the diversity of the classes is more prominent because often children who repeat classes come from other schools”, says Ginés.

“We try to avoid pigeonholing and the restriction of the traditional education. We work more like universities do, giving the students the possibility to choose the activities of studies ‘a la carte’. In high school, the activities are offered in a daily menu -math, language, biology, social studies- and the child chooses. A student can be dyslexic and be no good for writing but be excellent for talking, so instead of going to language classes he goes to the radio workshop where he generates texts and uses the language”, states the school responsible.

In La Cecilia, there is also a visual arts atelier, music is taught and there are different workshops which attracts many children involved in art.

“We work with the children’s strong points. Our policy is helping them to know themselves, to discover and develop their interests and capabilities, so they see how to use them as a source of living, without losing social consciousness. This is our complete statement on educational purposes” concludes Ginés.

***“Only if we listen we can learn. And listening is an act of silence; only a calm but extraordinarily active mind can learn”. Jiddu Krishnamurti***

## ASSEMBLY

Students have meetings on Fridays where topics and difficulties that happened during the week are discussed. However, if there is something urgent to be addressed, the same children can meet at any time during the day.

## **NO EXAMS**

Students are evaluated permanently but they don't have any exams. Ginés assures that to take an exam at a child's early age produces a "psychological suffering that leaves marks". He maintains that this is not a hindrance for the future university performance.

## **THE CLASSROOMS**

Are designed like "dwellings", and they are pleasant spaces with adequate dimensions for groups of 10 or 15 children and young people which is the amount of students disposed per sections.

## **NO TO ALCOHOL**

The school is vegetarian but in their homes students can eat meat. However, with alcohol and cigarettes, the restriction reaches out the exterior. That is also why teenagers are urged not to go to night clubs where alcoholic drinks and other substances are at hand. "We work on the character formation of students" supports Ginés.



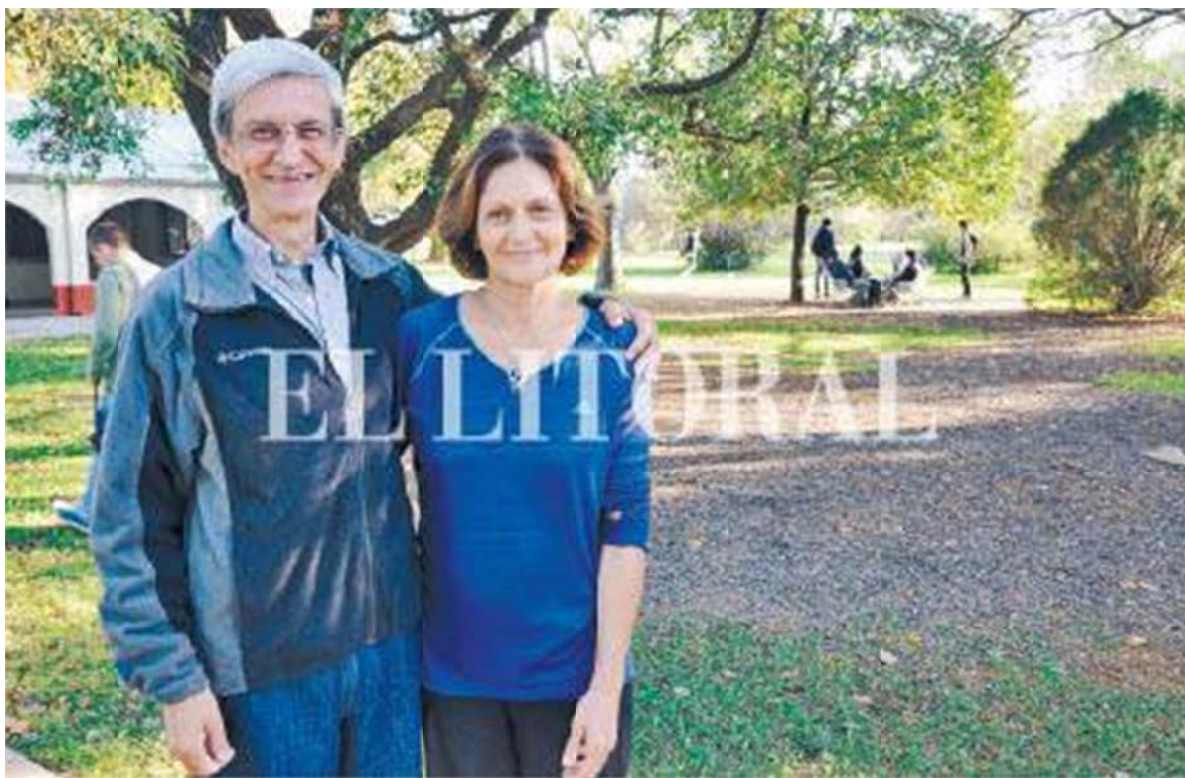


PHOTO – *Ginés del Castillo and his wife Cecilia. More than 20 years ago they fell in love with the land surrounded by nature and they dared to create their own school. Ginés took part of the documentary “The prohibited education”.*



PHOTO – *“The students start their morning doing 15 minutes of meditation (Morning meeting) to commence a calmed school day. Before this, they take off their shoes in the gallery.*

## **SCHOOL'S PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES**

### **ON DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOMS**

Education in freedom and contact with nature were the foundation pillars of La Cecilia. With time, the school was adhering to Democratic Schools principles and Krishnamurti Schools, which gave its philosophic-pedagogical basis to the project.

“Our school enrolls within the world’s democratic school movements. In Argentina, we are the only school enrolled. This implies a non-authoritarian functioning, where decisions are taken by all and in meetings. There is not like a professor that is above -in a pedestal- and cannot be questioned”, explains Ginés del Castillo.

According to the person in charge of La Cecilia, the education at the school is centered on the student. “In the traditional system we are used to that the center of the teaching-learning is the teacher who enters the class already knowing what to teach. In here instead, the teacher enters the class and works with the student’s needs”, affirms the creator of the proposal.

“Of course, not every teacher adapts to this system and some have lasted a couple of hours and never came back”. “I remember a relief English teacher who questioned why students didn’t ask to go to the toilet. Is it perhaps that in her house they should do it?” asks Ginés.

La Cecilia also inspires in the teaching of Jiddu Krishnamurti, who was born in India and considered one of the greatest philosophers in modern times, a religious person without religion, also a speaker, writer and educator. “His teachings complement in a higher aspect the sense of a democratic school, where freedom is not just simply exercised in democracy, but as an inner freedom. It is understood that to be free, external restrictions must not only be avoided, but the inner ones as well -maintains Ginés-. One can set free a teenager but who manipulates him: the fashion, the urban tribes, the publicity. This conditioning has to be seen by the children”

The project also includes Self-knowledge Workshops, run by Ginés himself, where students’ interesting topics are discussed. “Here we try to see the part of the problem

that is inside us. That is: what this problem causes in me. A bit like the Chilean biologist Maturana says with his concept of 'autopoiesis': which means that everything that happens inside ourselves is according to the structures that every one of us have; then is about being able to modify those structures".







## **“LICKING THE WOUNDS”**

To the La Cecilia high school come teenagers who choose the proposal by conviction as much as others who failed the traditional educational system: repeat students, dyslexic, ADHD students or behavioral problem students. “Here we consider that child’s discipline is an emergent of an inner suffering. Perhaps he was mistreated in his previous school by low grades, repeated years, or by other ways impossible to believe”, says Ginés del Castillo.

“When a student comes to ‘La Cecilia’, the first we do is leaving him in peace for a while, so he can adjust, get used to other treatment. In general, with just that is enough to work. We call this a process of licking the wounds, like a wounded animal that hides in a corner and licks itself. Sometimes this child is more reluctant to go to learning activities because he comes from a school that made him, for example, hate mathematics and it takes time for him to take up that class again”.

*(\*) Translation from Spanish by G. Albertelli – July 2014*